

This is an interview with Mr. Ralph Siddoway conducted at the Golden Age Center, 155 South 100 West, Vernal, Utah about his father, William H. Siddoway, on this 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1978 by Mike Brown.

Mike Brown (MB): What can you tell me about your dad, William H. Siddoway?

Ralph Siddoway (Ralph): Well, he was born in Salt Lake. He came out here to Vernal in 1888 and found a place he wanted to buy, then he went back to Salt Lake and got married in 1890 and he and his wife moved out here. They bought that place one mile north of the center of town as soon as he got out here in 1890. I can't remember the name of the person who homesteaded it or who he bought it from, but it's Mary Fox's grandfather.

MB: That's who he bought it from?

Ralph: That's who he bought it from. She's told me his name several times, but I never could pronounce it so I can't remember it. [Dougherty]

MB: Well, that's a place to start anyway. If he bought that in 1890, the county courthouse should have records as to the transfer or sale. Was he a young man then?

Ralph: Yes, he was twenty-two then.

MB: In 1890?

Ralph: Yes.

MB: What was his business?

Ralph: He took up farming as soon as he got here. When he came out here the only business he knew was just labor. He was a pretty good carpenter. His dad was a carpenter and he was a good carpenter. He wanted to farm. As soon as he got out here and bought the farm, he started looking out a little farther and got interested in the sawmill business. He went up to Taylor Mountain with George Johnstun's father. George Johnstun's father already had a sawmill up there and they went into partners. Dad ran the sawmill and Mr. Johnstun stayed down here and sold the lumber.

MB: Was that all?

Ralph: Yes, Al Johnstun. A little while later, Mr. Johnstun sold out to Dad and Dad ran it on his own for, I think, eight to ten years. I don't know exactly how long, but somewhere in that neighborhood. During that time Mother worked at the sawmill, too. There wasn't any way to get lathe and shingles in here like there was later. They sawed lathe and shingles both up there. Mother would bind shingles and bind the lathes.

I don't know just how many men they had up there, somewhere in the neighborhood of ten or twelve men working at the sawmill. Mother cooked for the loggers all the time they ran the sawmill. As soon as he decided to build a home, he starting selecting the best lumber to build his home from. I think he built that home somewhere around 1898. I know it was there in 1900 and I think it was around 1898 when he built it. He had selected all that lumber that he'd sawed himself. It was all built from that. Jay Pack just told me that William H. Hoeft was the architect and the builder of that house. Mr. Hoeft came from Germany. He had done quite a little building in Germany.

Later, Mr. Hoeft was a member of the Board of Education here when they built the Uintah High School building that they built in 1925. Mr. Hoeft was a school board member then and he was still interested in building. But anyway, he's the only one that designed the house and built it. Of course, Dad did a lot of the work on that house, too, but Mr. Hoeft was the architect. He drew the plans and the whole thing.

MB: Does he have family here?

Ralph: I don't think there are any of his descendants left here. He did have a family here, but I don't believe there is a Hoeft left in the valley.

MB: I wonder where a person would find out about them.

Ralph: I don't know. One of his daughters married a Coltharp. The Coltharps were the first real businessmen in the valley, except S. M. Browne. S. M. Browne and the Coltharps were tied together some way. The Coltharps were real business people. They built that building where the Bank of Vernal is and where Ashtons store is now. They built that whole block. The operated a mercantile store there and they also started the Bank of Vernal. One of Mr. Hoeft's daughters married Edward Coltharp. I don't know where any of the Hoeft descendants are right now. They did live here for quite a long time. They raised a family here.

MB: It's possible they might be out in Salt Lake.

Ralph: Yes.

MB: William Hoeft. Was he an architect or builder by profession?

Ralph: Yes, that was his profession.

MB: Did you know him too?

Ralph: Yeah, I knew him. He spoke very brokenly. My oldest sister and my oldest brother were not born in the house, but my third brother was born in the house.

MB: Who was that?

Ralph: That was John. He was born in the house and all the rest of the family were born in the

house. There were nine children and seven of us were born in the home. I was born on my dad's birthday on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October.

MB: That's funny, I was, too, though on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October. Did your dad have humble beginnings?

Ralph: Real humble beginnings. His mother was the second wife of a polygamist father. My dad never did like his dad. When I got old enough to understand why, I could see why because my dad and his mother, his mother had two children, one daughter and my dad, and they lived two blocks away from the first wife of the polygamist family. The first wife of the polygamist family had a great big, luxurious, red brick home. The second wife, my father's mother, had a little two-room house that my grandfather built for her. But he didn't put any windows in it and he didn't put any doors in it. That's the way I understand he treated my grandmother all the time, just something that he had to put up with.

MB: Was it kind of a pecking order of wives?

Ralph: Yeah. Like I say, his first wife lived in luxury, but the second wife lived in poverty.

MB: Did he just have two?

Ralph: He had three wives, but one of them had died. She died before he came to Utah.

MB: Did you ever know your grandfather?

Ralph: No, I never did know him. All my life I've understood that Dad was bitter towards his dad. I was pretty well grown before I could understand it. When I went out to Salt Lake and saw how his first wife was living and the how my grandmother was living, I could understand how Dad felt. He was always bitter about his dad. So he didn't talk much about his dad either. My dad was pretty much, if he couldn't say something good about somebody, he wouldn't say anything. Very little did he ever tell me about his dad, but what he did tell me and what I could see when I was a small child, I could understand why. He had no use for his dad nor for polygamy. He was strictly opposed to anything that resembled polygamy.

MB: I would assume then that everything your dad accumulated he did on his own?

Ralph: That's practically true. He had an uncle who gave him a little money to start with. For this money Dad was to take care of him for rest of his life. That was William Upfield; he came out here with Dad and Mother when they came. Dad took care of him as long as he lived. He died with cancer, I think, in 1922.

MB: You would have known the man?

Ralph: Yes, I knew him real well. He lived right with the family.

MB: He was part of the family?

Ralph: He was part of the family until about the last ten years. The last ten years Dad built him a house that was just about thirty feet from our house. He moved into that. He liked to be alone a lot. When he lived with us, he'd go upstairs in his room. That big room upstairs in that pinnacle was Uncle William's room. We always respected Uncle William's room.

MB: I'm trying to think what your niece called that on the phone last night. Not the turret room, the tower room. Is that it?

Ralph: Yeah, that's it. We always knew that was Uncle William's home. He always came down to eat with us. He did a few chores around the place, but he never did have a job. He stayed right there on the place all his life.

MB: Was he real sickly, all his life?

Ralph: Most all of his life his was quite sickly. He chopped wood and he sawed wood. He like to saw wood. We always had a great big pile of wood that was sawed and had a great big pile left for him to saw. He always had something to do. He had a few geese and a few turkeys, chickens, things like that that he could take care of. But to actually get out and work, he never did. He lived right there and Dad took care of him. That's really where Dad got his first money to start with. I think that was enough to buy the farm with and enough money to buy an interest in that sawmill. From then on, Dad was on his own.

MB: That's how he started? How did he branch out, what did he branch out to?

Ralph: Sheep was the way he started. He told me years later that if he were a young man and wanted to make money fast, the best way to do it is with a sawmill. He made quite a little money in the sawmill business. Then he got interested in sheep. Of course, at that time all you had to have was sheep, there was plenty of land. You didn't have to own any land. Just run them on public land anywhere you wanted too. So it was real easy to start in sheep, and he started in sheep. He had some sheep before he sold the sawmill, but not very many. He stayed with the sheep all his life. He died in 1950, and he still had sheep when he died.

When they started the Taylor Grazing Act in 1934, the started issuing BLM permits. He had one of the first permits and that was for 9,000 head. He was quite a substantial sheep raiser. He was also issued one on Grizzly Ridge that Jim Siddoway owns and the one down in Green Draw. Jim owns half of it and I own half of it.

MB: Is this your brother?

Ralph: Jim is my brother's son. He is Raymond's son. We still have those original forest permits and the original Bureau of Land Management allotments, too. He was one of the early sheep men in the business. There were a few sheep men before him that had started in the sheep business but there was never a very big industry until he started and he grew right with it. I guess Carter and Bennion and John Reader were in the business before he was, but very few.

MB: Did you tell me he had a hand in the bank here?

Ralph: Yeah, there was the Bank of Vernal here and as I told you before it was started by the Coltharps. Then they hired N. J. Meagher to be the cashier. Of course, the cashier in those days was the manager. So, Mr. Meagher came here and was the manager of the bank and it was quite a successful bank, too. But there grew up a feeling of, oh, dislike and friction. Some of the people didn't like Mr. Meagher and Mr. Meagher was Catholic.

MB: That was a non-LDS institution, wasn't it?

Ralph: It was. Several of the owners in that bank were LDS people, but the majority were not. It was really started by non-Mormons.

MB: Coltharps wasn't?

Ralph: Coltharps were not Mormon and neither was S. M. Browne and neither was Mr. Meagher. It is easy to understand that some friction grew up and so on.

They started the Uintah State Bank and Dad was one of the original incorporators of the Uintah State Bank. It grew and prospered right from the start. When Dad died, he [had been] president of the Uintah State Bank for somewhere around twelve or fifteen years. During that period of time, they had three times the number of depositors, three times the amount of assets, that the Bank of Vernal had. They were much more prosperous during that time than the Bank of Vernal was.

The Bank of Vernal was a good bank, too. To start in a new bank and be more prosperous than that old bank, it took some real good entrepreneurs and some good business judgement. In the other bank you find the Bennions were interested in it and the Woolleys. They engaged Mr. Curry as their cashier. Mr. Curry was not an LDS man and he wasn't Catholic either. I can't tell you really what he was. He came from England and he was a real well-educated person. He did a real good job of managing the bank. It prospered right from the start.

MB: That's the Uintah State Bank? Who did you say again were your dad's partners?

Ralph: It was a corporation, it was incorporated. I think S. R. Bennion and David Bennion and Hardin Bennion and Horace Woolley.

MB: Was Smart in on the deal?

Ralph: Yes, William H. Smart and J. K. Bullock and Thomas O'Donnell. Thomas W. O'Donnell was one of the leading attorneys in the whole of eastern Utah. There are some others, but I can't remember them. Mr. Banks was one. You've heard about Mr. Banks working out at Dragon and the Uintah Railways? Mr. Banks was one of the early incorporators in that business.

MB: Did they put up all the money themselves?

Ralph: They put up all the money.

MB: There was no such thing as federal matching funds or anything like that?

Ralph: No federal matching. It was a state bank. It was given a state charter. It was always a state bank. It was never incorporated as a federal bank. However, they did join the federal reserve system when that came along in 1913. They joined the federal reserve system and so did the Bank of Vernal. But they were never a federal bank, always a state bank.

MB: Now did he start the Co-op, too?

Ralph: No, he didn't. He was an early stockholder in it. But I think you would have to say that S. R. Bennion started that Co-op. From all the information I can get, he was really the one that started it.

MB: Was your dad in the management of it?

Ralph: No. He never was in the management of it until later. He was on the board of directors, but that was quite a while later. He did start several other businesses, though. He was an incorporator of the Vernal Milling Company, an incorporator of the Vernal Power and Light Company, the Vernal Drug Company, and the Vernal Amusement Company and the Uintah Abstract Company. He was also an incorporator in the Leslie Ashton Hardware Company.

In most of these companies he became president of the company, but not in Leslie Ashton Hardware, it took three people to incorporate and he was more or less a friendly incorporator in Leslie Ashton Hardware. He and Les Ashton were real good friends. See Ashton, just got Dad to be one of the incorporators. He never was in the management of it. He always traded there and did a lot of business with Leslie Ashton and they were real good friends. But Leslie Ashton owned more than fifty percent of it and he operated it just as he planned. But Dad was one of the incorporators of it. In these others companies, he became president of every one of them at one time.

MB: Was this simultaneous sometimes?

Ralph: He was president of the flour mill and the power company at the same time. He was also president of the Uintah Abstract Company at the same time. Then it was a few years after that he became president of the Vernal Drug Company. Of course, it was quite a bit later when the Vernal Amusement Company was incorporated. The Vernal Amusement Company was the one that operated the Vogue Theater and that was around in 1918, I think, when that started. These other companies started way back, 1905 to 1910.

MB: Were they successful?

Ralph: Every one of them was successful.

MB: He made money on them?

Ralph: He made money on all of them. He wasn't a major owner, his investment in these wasn't as large as some of the other men, but he was always on the Board of Directors and nearly always president.

MB: Wonder where he got his business sense?

Ralph: It's something he didn't pass on. None of the rest of us have got it.

MB: Was he well educated?

Ralph: No, he wasn't. Well, now, that isn't true, he was well educated. He was real well educated, but he didn't get it in school.

MB: He was self-taught?

Ralph: His mother was a schoolteacher and she taught him to begin with, then he went to school some. But, he was never a college graduate. He never went to high school. But he was real well educated. His dad did teach him carpenter work. He was a real good carpenter.

One of his best teachers was after he came here, in business experience, was S. R. Bennion. I can still remember some of the quotes that S. R. Bennion told him. S. R. Bennion taught him to keep books. S. R. Bennion told him it didn't make any difference how much money he made, but how much he saved. He was always teaching this. Another thought S. R. Bennion gave him was, "A little comfort is worth a deal of pity."

MB: I don't understand.

Ralph: What he meant was, a lot of us go around sympathizing with people, only we don't do anything about it. S. R. Bennion says just a little material support: take them down a leg of mutton or take them down a hind quarter of beef to somebody who is poor and needs it. Just don't sit and feel sorry for them, because a little comfort it worth a deal of pity.

MB: I see. Was that his philosophy?

Ralph: That was his philosophy.

MB: Was he a man of action in that regard?

Ralph: Yes, he was. S. R. Bennion was a man of wealth and he was president of the [Uintah] stake. He called Dad to be a high counselor when he was president of the stake.

MB: I was going to ask you, what was your dad's religious involvement?

Ralph: He was High Counselor, I guess, for about eighteen years. While the tabernacle was being built, he was called on a five-year mission to oversee the building of the tabernacle. He was real

active in church affairs. At his funeral, Walter Woolley said there wasn't a public building in Vernal at that time that my dad's time, money and ingenuity didn't go into. He liked to build and he liked to see things built. Any chapel that was built anywhere in the county, even over on the west side, he was quite influential in helping the thing get started. He was quite a big donator in things like that.

MB: He donated to stuff like that?

Ralph: He had quite a background of experience in building. He was real interested in helping any of these places get started.

MB: I take it, then, he was quite a devout man in his religion?

Ralph: Yes, he was devout, but he wasn't strict. He didn't say, "You've got to go to church." If I didn't want to go to church, I didn't go to church. I always knew that he wanted me to. But he never did say, "You've got to."

MB: Did he proselytize any?

Ralph: No, he wasn't a preacher. He was very slow about trying to change somebody from their belief to his belief. He did believe what he believed and he wanted me to know what he believed. But he didn't preach it out in public.

MB: Did he get a lot of his religious strength from his mother if he was bitter towards his father?

Ralph: Yes, I think so. He got it from his mother. His father must have been quite a devout man because he walked across the plains pushing a handcart to get here. He must have been a real believer. But I think dad got his real belief from his mother.

MB: Was he involved in politics?

Ralph: Yeah, Dad was a County Commissioner for somewhere around twenty years. He was president of the Board of Education for about twenty years. He was in the House of Representatives of Utah for three terms. He was real interested in politics. He did talk politics, but he didn't get heated up over it.

MB: What was his political persuasion?

Ralph: He was a Republican. He was a conservative Republican.

MB: A conservative Republican? I'm trying to think way, way back to Grover Cleveland. Cleveland was a Democrat, wasn't he? So your dad wouldn't have supported him?

Ralph: That's one he did.



MB: Cleveland was a very religious man, wasn't he?

Ralph: That's the only time he ever voted Democratic.

MB: So he crossed the lines. Did he like Cleveland?

Ralph: He liked the man, but he said his politics were just wrong. He was a Reed Smoot Republican, a protective tariff Republican. He thought we really needed to have a protective tariff to build up our new industries. At that time I think we did, too. He was strictly opposed to any free trade or any sign of it like the Democrats showed. They were for low tariff and the Republicans were for a protective tariff. He was always a believer in protective tariffs.

MB: Would he have been a Teddy Roosevelt man?

Ralph: He was a Teddy Roosevelt man and he was a Taft man.

MB: Was politics discussed at the dinner table in your house?

Ralph: Yes, but very minorly. We never did have any big heated arguments over it. In fact, we didn't argue with Dad. If Dad said something, that was it, and we knew it, too.

MB: Was he authoritarian?

Ralph: Quite authoritarian. But I never did see him whip any of our kids and he never did whip me.

MB: That's different.

Ralph: That's real different. We never did whip our kids either.

MB: Did he have a quiet authority?

Ralph: Yeah, real quiet. He had quite a temper, he could get mad real quick, and his voice came up. But he never did strike anyone that I know of.

MB: In your house, did you guys do a lot of socializing?

Ralph: Yes, a lot.

MB: That's what I was wondering. Did a lot of these people you've been mentioning come over to your house for dinner or parties?

Ralph: Yeah. The Jensens, the Carters, Calders, the Whitbecks, the Hackings, all those people would come to our place for Sunday dinner or Thanksgiving or for Christmas or for New Year's. We had what we called the little dining room where we would eat sometimes, but mostly we had

a large kitchen.

We had a large kitchen and that's where we ate nearly all the meals, where we ate as a family. We had a big long table and it took a long table, too, when you had ten to twelve people eating with us. Dad had lots of friends and a lot of his friends were poor people. Nearly always we'd have somebody eat with us at dinner time besides our own family. We'd eat in the kitchen.

Then we had a little dining room, that was originally built for a dining room, but it was too small. My mother never did think it was adequate. Then they had a big dining room and they had a big dining room table in there and nice chairs and one of those big polished stoves. We didn't have any heating plant in those days. Every room had a stove in it. This had a big fancy stove, nickel-plated all over. It was a real pretty stove.

Adjacent to that, we called it the parlor, they call it the living room now, but in the parlor we had a fireplace and a piano and some nice overstuffed furniture. Anytime people came down to socialize, then we always opened up the dining room. Between the dining room and the parlor they had folding doors. They're still there, I hope. You could divide the dining room and the parlor off. That was always opened up so it was like one big room. You could have twenty or thirty people in there quite comfortably.

MB: When friends of your parents would come over, were the kids allowed in there?

Ralph: You bet!

MB: You weren't tossed out, kicked out?

Ralph: No. Sometimes friends brought their kids and sometimes they didn't. But the kids were never excluded, never excluded from anything in our house.

MB: Vernal's society, if you can call it that, was you dad was a member of that?

Ralph: Yes, he was a leader in the society. He was. People looked up to him. A lot of people he wasn't related to at all called him Uncle Will. That was before he was too old, too. That wasn't because of his age, they just had kind of a respect for him to call him Uncle Will. Of course, he did have quite a few relatives around here.

MB: That's what I was wondering, where did the rest of the Siddoways come from?

Ralph: Now, Frank Siddoway is Lawrence's father. Frank Siddoway is a cousin of my dad. My dad's dad and Frank's dad were brothers. There were two Siddoway brothers who came over in handcarts, one was John Siddoway and the other was Robert Siddoway. From these two brothers came the Siddoways in Salt Lake, Idaho and Vernal.

I told you about the polygamist family my dad came from. His half-brothers that lived two blocks from him moved to Idaho. They're up around Rexburg and Twin Falls and that country and they're still there. They went into the sheep business, too. They're still in the sheep business up there. This Bill Siddoway, who was President of the National Wool Growers Association three years ago, is my cousin. He's from Robert Siddoway, but from the first polygamist family, and they still live in Idaho.

MB: That was quite a prolific family.

Ralph: Yeah, it was, quite prolific.

MB: How many bedrooms were in that house?

Ralph: Four bedrooms upstairs and two downstairs, six bedrooms.

MB: Did you still do some doubling up?

Ralph: Yeah, two of the boys always slept together and two of the girls always slept together. We always doubled up.

MB: Did your house have plumbing when you were a young boy?

Ralph: They put it in when I was a young boy. It didn't originally have plumbing. They put it in when I guess I was ten years old.

MB: That was quite an innovation then.

Ralph: Yeah, it was. That was quite an innovation. See, there wasn't any water in the valley really until around 1905, or later than that even. So it was quite a while after they had water here in town before it got a mile north of town. That was quite a project to extend that water line a mile north to the Siddowses' and that's what they had to do.

MB: When did your house get electrified?

Ralph: It was electrified the first time I can remember it. Dad was president of the electric company and the electric lines came right through our pasture. I imagine by the time they had lights in town, we had lights there. I know the first I can remember we had power.

MB: Just out of curiosity, did Vernal ever have a gas light era?

Ralph: I don't remember them ever having gas lights. They had coal oil lights, but I don't remember them having gas lights. As a matter of fact, we had no gas until about 1924.

MB: With a household that size, did your mom have any help?

Ralph: Yeah, nearly always Mother had what we called a hired girl. She came right there and lived with us most of the time. Usually, she'd come Monday morning and leave Saturday night. She'd stay there and help Mother prepare meals, keep the house clean and that sort of thing.

MB: Help with the kids, too?

Ralph: Yes, helped with the kids. She lived in with us.

MB: Did she have her own little section of the house?

Ralph: She had her own room.

MB: What was the going rate in those days?

Ralph: I think it was \$5 a week.

MB: Would this generally be a farm girl?

Ralph: Yeah, it would be a farm girl.

MB: Are any of your old girls still around? Were they generally young or old?

Ralph: They were young. There's one I can remember, Marie Wise was her maiden name. She married a Soderquist and she is still here. Mrs. Marie Soderquist is still living and she is one of the hired girls I can remember.

MB: Was that common practice at that time?

Ralph: Yeah, that was common practice.

MB: Would a girl last a long time?

Ralph: Ordinarily they did. They'd last quite a while. When they'd get to know the family, they'd get to like the family and they wouldn't look for anything else. They would stay until they went away to school or got married or something like that.

MB: How about the maintenance of the home, like the heavy work. If it needed to be painted or yard work outside, or something like that? Was there anyone hired or did you men do it?

Ralph: Yeah, we had a hired man around nearly all the time, besides the sheep herders and camp movers and that sort of thing. Dad had a hired man around nearly all the time. Dad was quite a farmer, in fact, he owned four good farms. He didn't do all the farming. They were farmed out on shares. But this place there with the house, he kept a hired man around all the time.

MB: Was that a noisy place to grow up?

Ralph: I didn't think so then, but I guess I would think so now.

MB: Was there always activity?

Ralph: There was always activity. Always plenty to do. Our home was right there on the creek. If

you ran out of something to do, all you had to do was go down to the creek and you could think of something. You could go swimming, or you could go skating, or you could get on your sleigh and coast down. We always had horses. Each one of us had our own horse and we had our own saddle. If we got bored, we were free to go any place we wanted to. The road ended right at our house. To get anyplace north of our house, you had to go through our pasture.

END OF INTERVIEW